United Nations A/C.3/58/SR.12

General Assembly
Fifty-eighth session

Official Records

Distr. General
9 March 2004
English
Original: Spanish

Third Committee

Summary record of the 12th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 15 October 2003, at 3 p.m.

Chairman : Mr. Priputen (Vice Chairman) ..... (Slovakia)

Contents

Agenda item 110 : Advancement of women *(continued)*

Agenda item 111 : Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled « Women 2000 : gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century » *(continued)*

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned within one week of the date of publication to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

03-55830 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 110: Advancement of women *(continued)* (A/58/3, A/58/38 (Supplement No. 38), A/58/161, A/58/167, A/58/167/Add.1, A/58/168 A/58/169, A/58/374, A/58/341, A/58/417 and A/58/16 (extract))

Agenda item 111: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" *(continued)* (A/58/3 and A/58/166)

1. **Mr. Kumalo** (South Africa) said that since 1994 South Africa had been grappling with the transformation of its society and the creation of a better life for all. Nevertheless, poverty remained a problem for women in South Africa, particularly in rural areas. The underdevelopment of infrastructure in rural areas had been directly responsible for the poor conditions under which the majority of rural communities lived. The provision of adequate and accessible health services, especially in rural areas, remained essential. In South Africa pregnant women had access to free primary health care, as did children up to six years of age, and those services included free treatment of diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria. However, the lack of affordable medicines was one of the challenges faced not only by South Africa but by all African countries south of the Sahara.

2. The spread of HIV/AIDS was another serious problem, although levels of awareness had increased to more than 95 per cent, which had resulted in behaviour change for about 70 per cent of young women aged 15 to 19 years. More than 90 per cent of women in South Africa attended antenatal clinics during pregnancy, and two thirds of those women had access to voluntary counselling and testing and to the programme for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission. The country had invested more than 20 million rand in the South African AIDS vaccine initiative. Preparations were now being made for second-phase vaccine trials, and the ethical aspects of conducting vaccine trials on children were being debated.

3. Violence against women and girls remained a major challenge in South African society. The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development had enacted and amended laws such as those relating to sexual offences and domestic violence, classifying as crimes various forms of violence against women, taking measures such as suppression, punishment and law enforcement for the prevention and elimination of violence. A Sexual Offences and Community Affairs Unit had been established to deal with those problems. Anti-retroviral drugs were also being provided to survivors of sexual assaults as part of a comprehensive support programme.

4. The adoption of a holistic approach to gender mainstreaming aimed at transforming systems and structures for gender equality was essential. Reaffirming the statement made on behalf of the countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and highlighting the commitment made by the States members of the African Union to achieve at least 30 per cent representation of women in politics and decision-making by 2005, his delegation wished to emphasize the need for strong and meaningful mechanisms to achieve gender equality as stipulated in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which had a central role to play in building institutions necessary for deepening the political, social and cultural empowerment of women on the African continent. Its vision was based on principles of good governance, human-resources development and, in particular, the full integration of women into the economies of the region.

5. South Africa had done everything possible to include women in all aspects of the country's governance and had made progress towards the objectives of gender equality by putting women's issues in the forefront of its political agenda. In the national Parliament nine out of 27 cabinet ministers and seven out of 14 deputy ministers were women. The Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly were women, as was the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces. The Commission on Gender Equality operated as an oversight body to ensure active participation by civil society on gender issues in the country. Nevertheless, much still remained to be done in gender mainstreaming and in implementing the other principles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and of the Beijing Platform for Action.

6. With respect to the inclusion of women in the process of United Nations reform, significant representation and participation of women in United Nations structures and national Governments required urgent attention. The process of United Nations reform should therefore be influenced by the outcome of the Committee's work. The international community should continue reinforcing the unity and central role of the United Nations in dealing with questions relating to the human rights of women.

7. **Ms. Helwig Vikør** (Norway) said that equal rights and opportunities for men and women in all areas of society were essential for achieving sustainable economic and social development, and the empowerment of women was of key importance to achieving gender equality. Despite the progress made, gender discrimination remained pervasive in many parts of the world, if not worldwide. Such inequalities not only were unfair but constituted a barrier to development and democracy. Women still formed a minority of those who participated in peace and security negotiations and received less attention than men in post-conflict agreements, disarmament and reconstruction. In that connection, her delegation welcomed the creation of a gender focal point in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, which deserved all possible support from the Secretariat and Member States. Norway would assist in the implementation of United Nations gender policies and stood ready to offer any support required for progress in that area.

8. Violence against women was a multifaceted problem. The challenge was to investigate the root causes, including women's socio-economic position, their political situation, their access to justice and the impunity of perpetrators of gender violence. Such violence also remained a serious challenge in Norway's relatively gender-equal society. Consequently, in November Norway would launch a new national action plan which would focus on men as perpetrators of acts of violence and on children growing up in a violent family situation.

9. Globalization had brought new forms of gender violence. In January 2003 her Government had launched a national plan of action to combat trafficking in women and thereby make an important contribution to the struggle against organized crime. On 23 September 2003 Norway had ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, which would enter into force on 29 December. She called upon all countries that had not yet done so to ratify the Convention as soon as possible.

10. In June 2003 Norway had launched its International Plan for Action for Combating Female Genital Mutilation. The Plan was expected to have an annual budget of $US3 million by 2005. Norway had increased its financial support to non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies struggling to put an end to female genital mutilation. New legislation submitted to the Norwegian Parliament was aimed at increasing transparency and public control of marriage contracts, including a stricter law to protect minors from forced marriages.

11. During the past two decades Norwegian women had gained considerable political influence and a high level of participation in the workforce. Nevertheless, women remained largely absent from decision-making positions in the private sector. In June 2003 her Government had presented to Parliament a bill proposing a requirement of at least 40 per cent representation of women on the boards of all State-owned enterprises and those of public limited companies in the private sector. The aim was to promote gender equality and good democratic governance and to strengthen management in the business sector and the competitiveness of companies. Lastly, Norway welcomed the initiative of having the work of the next session of the Commission on the Status of Women focus on the role of men and boys in reaching gender equality. Norway called on men and boys to join forces with women and girls to eliminate all gender-based discrimination.

12. **Ms. Khalil** (Egypt) said that the President of the Republic had called for the preparation of a new bill amending the Nationality Act and giving Egyptian fathers and mothers married to foreign nationals equal rights with regard to the granting of the Egyptian nationality to their children, since the law up to the present had permitted such transmission of nationality only if the father was Egyptian. The new law would regulate the application and the prerequisites for the granting of nationality. Egypt had created a National Council for Women, a body responsible for proposing and developing general policies for society and its constitutional institutions in the sphere of the

development of women's issues and of training women in order to guarantee that they could fulfil their economic and social role and integrate their efforts into development programmes at the global level. A national plan had been worked out for the advancement of women and the follow-up of general policies in that area through the formulation of proposals and observations to the competent bodies.

13. The National Council for Women represented Egypt in international forums and organizations dealing with women's issues. A documentation centre had been created for all data, reports, studies and investigations relating to women; conferences, symposia and debates discussing questions of relevance to women had been held. The National Council for Women had focused on the application of the principles and recommendations of the Beijing Conference, especially in the areas of education, training, scientific research, health, population, political and economic participation, the environment and the elimination of poverty. The Council had approved an act on family courts which would be submitted to Parliament at its next session. It had also created an office for complaints from women which would deal with claims and complaints submitted by women in various spheres of everyday life and would provide them with legal assistance. It was worth noting that the first female Egyptian judge had been appointed, an initiative which crowned with success the efforts made by women over several decades to attain that objective.

14. In rural areas women lived in extremely difficult circumstances, especially in the light of educational shortages, illiteracy and rising unemployment rates. National strategic priorities for dealing with the problems of women, particularly in rural areas, included the elimination of illiteracy, reducing the unemployment rate, providing food security and eliminating poverty, promoting the creation of small-scale projects, providing basic services, potable water and sanitation services, in addition to promoting research aimed at improving the abilities of rural women and improving their standard of living. In the sphere of long-term national strategies, priority had been given to the development of rural areas, and the population had been encouraged to reside in those areas and work on projects aimed at ending migration towards the cities. Furthermore, the second generation of rural residents would be encouraged to remain in rural areas and to work in agriculture, and attention would be given to rural tourism. The strategies would focus on integrating rural women into the projects and programmes being carried out and on reducing the difficulties suffered by women with large families.

15. **Ms. Boiko** (Ukraine), speaking on behalf of the GUUAM Group (Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Uzbekistan), said that the GUUAM countries had made considerable progress in implementing the objectives of the Beijing and Beijing+5 Conferences through the adoption and implementation of national action plans based on the final documents of those Conferences. All of them were parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and Azerbaijan, Georgia and Ukraine had also signed and ratified the Protocol to the Convention.

16. The GUUAM Group appreciated the advances made in the methods of work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, especially the improvement of reporting guidelines and the strategy for encouraging States to submit overdue reports; taking into account the number of such overdue reports and the backlog in the consideration of reports, the Group would like to see that Committee opt for combining documents, particularly when dealing with non-initial reports. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women should also give greater attention to the implementation of general recommendation No. 19 on violence against women, since such violence constituted one of the major obstacles to the achievement of gender equality. Some of the GUUAM countries had created centres and shelters for the rehabilitation of women and children who had suffered violence, and the Group was very much interested in receiving relevant assistance from UNIFEM's Trust Fund, which had been established to support innovative strategies and best practices in that sphere.

17. It was disappointing that, despite its efforts, the Commission on the Legal and Social Status of Women had been unable to reach a consensus of draft agreed conclusions on the subject of violence against women. The GUUAM Group hoped that the draft resolution submitted by the Netherlands would be more successful and was gratified to see that that document included all forms of violence, from domestic violence to sexual exploitation and trafficking in persons. Those were among the worst forms of violence against

women. In order to combat such crimes, the GUUAM countries had taken a number of legislative measures that helped to promote international and regional cooperation. The multidimensional nature of the problem of trafficking in persons required the adoption of a comprehensive and integrated approach that would take account of socio-economic, cultural, legal and other factors. The GUUAM Group supported the steps taken by the Economic and Social Council and its Commissions against trafficking in women and girls, stressed the importance of bilateral and multilateral cooperation, was prepared to enhance that cooperation and called upon relevant United Nations entities to help deal with that problem.

18. Trafficking in persons and other forms of violence against women were especially frequent in armed conflicts, which continued to exist in many parts of the world, including some of the GUUAM countries. In those conflicts international humanitarian law, which prohibited attacks against the civilian population, was being systematically disregarded, and serious violations of human rights, especially those of the most disadvantaged groups, such as women, were being committed. That issue was of great concern to the GUUAM countries, since women and children constituted the majority of those who had become refugees and internally displaced persons as a result of unsettled armed conflicts in the region. Although many of those women were heads of families, their needs were seldom taken into account by international donors or by programmes for reconstruction and the distribution of humanitarian aid. The United Nations should play a decisive role in protecting that particularly vulnerable group. The GUUAM Group also wished to emphasize the importance of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which called upon all parties to an armed conflict to respect fully international law applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls and take special measures to protect them from gender-based violence; it was unfortunate that that document had not been fully implemented at the United Nations or elsewhere.

19. The protection of women and children who were victims of armed conflicts in the GUUAM countries was the main goal of the Cooperation Forum established in 2001. The memorandum signed at the first meeting of the Forum at Baku highlighted major elements of cooperation between the participating States: increasing women's participation in all spheres of socio-economic and political life, joint efforts by women in preventing conflicts and in post-conflict reconstruction, and fighting against violence and against trafficking in persons. The participants in the second meeting of the Forum, held at Kyiv, had expressed their concern at the persistence of armed conflicts in many parts of the world and called upon the United Nations and the Secretary-General to redouble their efforts to resolve existing armed conflicts and prevent others in the future. In conclusion, the GUUAM group wished to reaffirm its commitment to do its utmost to create a world in which women were healthy and educated, were free from violence and had a chance to work and earn as full and equal partners in society.

20. **Ms. Suryati** (Indonesia) said that her delegation wished to associate itself with the statement of the representative of Morocco, who had spoken on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Notwithstanding the considerable progress made through the work of the United Nations and Member States, women continued to face difficult challenges. As mentioned in the UNIFEM report on the progress of the world's women, women still had to grapple with hard facts such as the emotional pull of unpaid care work, the tension and exhaustion stemming from the struggle for equality and respect, as well as the terrible toll of ongoing violence in public and in private life, both in wartime and in peacetime. It was time to reaffirm the will to implement the commitments made at major United Nations conferences and summits, not to create new commitments. The advances made in those forums should be reflected without delay in practical and operational actions at the national level.

21. The advancement and empowerment of women were national priorities in Indonesia. All government offices, together with public institutions, non-governmental organizations, women's associations and communications media, were working together to achieve gender equity and gender equality. Efforts at the local level focused on empowering institutions to be gender-responsive, through training and financial support in collaboration with community organizations, non-governmental organizations and representatives of local governments. Moreover, Indonesia was paying particular attention to the issues of trafficking in women and children and the sexual exploitation of children. Two presidential decrees issued in 2002 formed the basis for the establishment of the national

action plans for the elimination of trafficking in women and children and for the elimination of commercial sexual exploitation of children.

22. Indonesia supported the participation of women in politics and decision-making processes at all levels. National Law No. 12/2003 on general elections guaranteed such participation and enabled each political party participating in a general election to use a 30 per cent quota for women representatives. Indonesia welcomed the United States draft resolution on women and political participation and was committed to participating constructively in the deliberations on that draft resolution.

23. The empowerment of women in rural areas and their access to resources of all kinds were also very important, and their needs were being taken into account in the processes of decentralization and regional autonomy taking place in the country At the same time, Indonesia was steadily moving forward in the implementation of the outcomes of the Beijing Conference and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, coordinated by the Office of the Minister for Women's Empowerment. However, Indonesia needed greater international cooperation and technical assistance in order to create a sustainable national capacity that would enable it to implement effectively the international commitments it had undertaken and to fulfil promptly its reporting obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

24. **Ms. Sauerbrey** (United States of America) said that the United States was firmly committed to women's rights, and for that reason it had sponsored at the current session a draft resolution on women and political participation. A successful democracy could not exist without the participation of all members of society, including women. Women were participating successfully in many aspects of political life but seldom were candidates for public office, and very few of them served in elective office at all levels of government. In many underdeveloped countries and emerging democracies women were eager to participate in the democratic process but did not know how to organize campaigns or overcome the barriers hampering their participation, and Governments and civil society must provide the tools for them to learn. The draft resolution reaffirmed that women, on an equal basis with men and without any discrimination, had the right to vote in all elections, to be candidates, to associate with like-minded individuals, to express their views publicly and to debate public policy openly. It was an action-oriented draft resolution which included practical suggestions for States and other actors in civil society on how those objectives were to be achieved. The support expressed by many Member States for that initiative was encouraging, and her delegation was grateful for the constructive suggestions made concerning the text.

25. The United States was financing activities throughout the world to train women to run for office and lead non-governmental organizations. In Iraq the United States had strongly supported the participation of women in the political, economic and social reconstruction of the country, and in Afghanistan it had provided financial support to promote women's participation in the electoral process. In the Middle East her Government's partnership initiative provided a framework for working with the private sector, civil society and Governments in the region and to expand political, economic and educational opportunities, particularly for women. Her Government's Department of State, the United States Agency for International Development and the institutes for international affairs established by the Democratic Party and the Republican Party had also organized and financed activities for promoting women's participation in politics in other countries, such as Rwanda, Kenya, Senegal, Serbia and Montenegro, and the Russian Federation.

26. The United States had also placed a major focus on combating trafficking in persons, a problem which affected primarily women and children and could be solved only by concerted and cooperative international efforts. In 2003 her Government had adopted a law that declared sexual tourism involving minors to be a criminal offence. The Department of State, the Department of Labor and the Agency for International Development had funded anti-trafficking programmes in some 50 countries and had made an assessment of the situation throughout the world which was reflected in the third annual report on the subject. The Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Human Services were involved in domestic anti-trafficking programmes. The principles guiding the work of the United States in that sphere included vigorous enforcement of laws against those involved in trafficking, raising awareness at home and abroad about human trafficking, protecting and assisting

victims, reducing the vulnerability of potential victims and promoting cooperation with other countries, the United Nations and multilateral institutions. She reaffirmed the commitment of the United States to the advancement of women throughout the world, since the problems and challenges confronting the international community could not be tackled without the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of life.

27. **Mr. Al-Harthy** (Oman) said that his country had experienced substantial development and been transformed in a short time from a rural society to a modern country. Women had participated in that process not only through their work in the education and health sectors but also in other spheres such as finance, marketing and engineering, where they had demonstrated their effectiveness and competitiveness at all levels. The women of Oman also held high decision-making posts. In 2003 a femle cabinet minister had been appointed for the first time, and women also served as members of Parliament and of the Advisory Council. Both men and women over 21 years of age had the right to vote and to be candidates in elections.

28. Women were the pillar of the family and needed protection and equality of opportunity in order to achieve their goals and contribute to the development of society. Oman was endeavouring to create a firm basis for women's fulfilment of their essential role in society and in the family in a secure environment. In order to promote their protection and stability, Oman had adopted laws that guaranteed equality of opportunity at all levels and recognized equal rights and obligations for men and women in conformity with the outcomes of the Beijing Conference.

29. Education was the engine of social change and an effective tool for eradicating poverty, achieving women's advancement and protecting children from exploitation. During the past three decades the Government had given priority attention to education, a fact reflected in an increase in school construction and the improvement of school equipment. Education should be started at the earliest possible age, thereby improving citizens' ability to serve their country, should be universal and should be anchored both in cultural and historical heritage and in technology and modern programmes. Women's education had been given special attention in recent years, and financial and other resources had been allocated to the development of programmes relating to women and girls, especially in the spheres of education, health, food and preparation for their integration into the working world.

30. **Mr. Laurin** (Canada), speaking on behalf of Australia, New Zealand and Canada, expressed those countries' commitment to the advancement of gender equality at the international level and to promoting and protecting women's human rights. Approaching the tenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, the international community had an opportunity not only to reflect on the advances made but also to make certain that it was on the right road to continue making significant advances for women's equality and fundamental rights. The international community could well be proud of its success in developing over the years a significant volume of instruments and norms in that sphere, including inter alia the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the outcome documents of the Beijing and Beijing+5 Conferences, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Australia, New Zealand and Canada reaffirmed their support for those instruments, their shared will to protect their integrity and their firm belief that they should continue to serve as the standards for national and international action in that area. They urged all Member States to accede to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and to do all in their power to fulfil all of their obligations under that Convention.

31. Those standards represented much more than the international community's collective ideals and aspirations; they were achievable goals, whose realization would transform the world into one in which everyone, women and men, girls and boys, would be free to achieve their full potential in a context of gender equality. One needed only to consider the continued and unacceptable abuse suffered by women and girls in every country and in every culture in order to understand how imperative it was to continue to strive to attain those goals.

32. For the promoters and protectors of women's rights the past year had been a difficult one in some respects. They were deeply depressed by ongoing efforts to renegotiate, and thereby weaken or undermine, long-standing commitments and standards on the human rights of women and the elimination of gender-based violence. The fact was that all States had

already agreed on international standards for addressing those issues. If real and lasting change was to occur, the international community must focus on the more urgent and important task of implementing those commitments without being distracted in the debate on violence against women by attempts to resolve the many political and economic problems of the world. All countries and communities suffered from gender inequality and its ultimate manifestation, gender-based violence, and therefore all must work together towards its elimination.

33. Australia, New Zealand and Canada concurred with the conclusions of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women in her end-of-term report (E/CN.4/2003/75), in which she emphasized that while the international community had in general adequately addressed the issue of standard-setting, the current problem was to implement existing laws and standards. In that context, the new draft resolution sponsored by the United States on political participation by women was an encouraging sign. Full and equal participation by women in political processes and at all levels of decision-making was a concrete way to bring about gender equality and to effect real and positive changes in the everyday life of citizens. Bearing in mind the challenge of implementing existing commitments, Australia, New Zealand and Canada continued to present a resolution calling for the improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system. The Third Committee should seize the opportunities afforded by the current session to ensure that the course towards meaningful progress in the advancement of women's rights and equality would continue to be followed. It was essential to reaffirm the agreed international standards, renew efforts and find appropriate tools to achieve the goals that had been set.

34. **Ms. Mohamed Ahmed** (Sudan) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made by Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. She stressed that the need to promote the advancement of women, which the States of the world had collectively emphasized, reflected the aspiration of humanity to protect women by preserving the identity of and respect for all human beings. In order to achieve that goal, questions affecting women must be addressed globally, using the structure and particular features of each society as the basis, since it would be difficult to agree on a single norm that would be applicable to all societies for solving problems that were highly diverse in nature. Girls' and women's enjoyment of their rights resulted from the full enjoyment of rights by all strata of society. Therefore justice was the touchstone of her Government's policy in every sphere, particularly with regard to women.

35. Despite the efforts made by Governments, civil society and non-governmental organizations to implement the decisions adopted at the Beijing Conference, the final document of the twenty-third special session of General Assembly, held in June 2000, had made clear the difficulties and inadequacies of that effort. While the main responsibility for achieving the objectives of the Beijing Conference rested with national Governments, it was important to bear clearly in mind the importance of international cooperation for the implementation of the decisions taken. The inevitable trend towards globalization, in spite of the opportunities it afforded, also involved the risk that the States which suffered its most adverse effects, especially the developing and least developed countries, would be completely marginalized by the world economy; that could have an impact on all aspects of life in those countries and particularly affect women and children.

36. The Secretary-General's report (A/58/166) made evident the laudable work of the General Assembly and its Main Committees in promoting equality through strategies for incorporating a gender perspective. Nevertheless, the report should also have examined the advances made in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly with regard to various goals, particularly those relating to the eradication of poverty and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and of the exploitation of women to force them into prostitution. She asked the Division for the Advancement of Women to see to it that those issues were included in the next report.

37. Violence against women in all its forms constituted an offence against women's dignity and rights. The steps taken to combat that phenomenon should be considered in a global focus which addressed the root causes of that violence and examined the means used to combat it, particularly national and international legislation. To act with rigour, activities to end violence should not concentrate solely on specific factors but should take account of the different causes of the problem. Those activities were also

hampered by the lack of statistics and information on how the various forms of violence against women were being manifested, and therefore the need to conduct studies and investigations on the subject should be borne in mind. At the national level, special attention had been given in the Sudan to the integration of a gender perspective in every sector, in conformity with the objectives and goals established in the outcomes of the Beijing Conference and of other conferences. High-level committees supported by national institutions and women's organizations had been established to follow up those recommendations. Those measures were being integrated into the Sudan's priorities in the spheres of education, health, peace, family stability, society, development and the struggle against poverty. In that connection, it was gratifying to report the advances made in the Sudan with respect to peacekeeping, and she was convinced that those advances would have a favourable impact on the standard of living and the economic status of society in general, and of women and children in particular.

38. Her delegation believed that the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly provided a new stimulus for the advancement and empowerment of women in every sector of society. he complete eradication of poverty and gender-based violence, particularly in those cases in which the effects of armed conflict and foreign occupation were borne by women, was indispensable for the attainment of those objectives. The international community should act in defence of the most noble human values in order to combat the execrable crimes which offended the dignity of women and led to their commercial exploitation, in addition to disrupting society. The Sudan stood firmly for a family model consistent with its natural form and for ensuring that the construction of a healthy and stable society in which women could play their natural role and guard the integrity of future generations would be inspired by the highest values.

39. **Mr. García Moritán** (Argentina) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the Peruvian delegation on behalf of the Rio Group. With regard to the Secretary-General's report on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/58/167 and Add.1), he said that rural problems were an economic and social priority for his country, which, according to the National Housing Census of 2001, had a rural population of about four million persons, half of whom were women. The issue of rural women should be considered in the general context of rural development and the problems that affected the rural sector, including a growing problem of poverty. In poverty situations rural women were forced to work harder, since they not only had to bear the burden of housework and feeding the family but also that of sustaining the family economy. In Argentina, according to the 2001 census, women represented nearly 20 per cent of the country's rural workforce; between 1980 and 1990, women's participation in the labour market had increased by 10 to 20 per cent. Yet, despite the importance of women in the productive and subsistence strategy of the rural family, their economic role and the value of their work often went unrecognized. In most cases, decisions on the production and marketing of products were taken by the man. In that context, since 1985, the Argentine Secretariat of Agriculture had carried out a systematic programme with rural women in the various regions of the country in order to achieve greater participation by rural women in organizational and social activities and their recognition as producers, integrating a gender perspective into all rural-development programmes and including the problems of rural women in public policies.

40. Violence against women migrant workers continued to cause concern, as the Secretary-General's report on that subject (A/58/161) had concluded. Argentina, which had been traditionally a country whose doors were open to immigration, could not close its eyes to that painful reality. In particular, it regarded the links between migration and trafficking in women as cause for concern and shared the belief that those subjects should be addressed jointly. To that end, in November 2002 Argentina had ratified the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to prevent, suppress and sanction trafficking in persons, especially women and children, which supplemented the Convention. Similarly, in March 2003 the first interdisciplinary workshops on trafficking in women had been held at Buenos Aires in order to increase social awareness of the subject in society and the Government and to promote public-information campaigns and national policies to prevent, suppress and eradicate that crime, which the Argentine Penal Code punished morew severely when the victims were under 18 years of age. In view of the need to ensure that the States of origin, transit and destination cooperated in investigating cases and combating trafficking in persons, at the

bilaterallevel Argentina maintained a significant degree of cooperation with Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru, and at the regional level the problems involved were dealt with in the meetings of Ministers of the Interior of the States parties to the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and had been discussed at the Third South American Conference on International Migrations, held at Quito.

41. With regard to the Secretary-General's report on traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls (A/58/169) and, in particular, with regard to crimes against women committed in the name of honour, his delegation reaffirmed that present Argentine legislation did not regard the defence of honour as justifying impunity or attenuating the severity of the penalty. On the contrary, the Argentine Penal Code punished more severely anyone who killed his ascendants, descendants or spouse if he was aware of the relationship. An attenuating factor that was indeed provided for in Argentine penal legislation was the so-called "state of violent emotion", a circumstance by virtue of which the perpetrator did not realize the severity of his action because he was suffering from temporary psychological alteration; that circumstance was applicable to both sexes.

42. **Ms. Fusano** (Japan) said that as globalization transformed the world in the current era, many complex issues came to be interconnected, including the gender issue, which was multifaceted and needed to be tackled from many angles and was also one of the core elements of human security. She therefore expressed Japan's appreciation for the trend throughout the United Nations towards incorporating a gender perspective into all of its its agenda.

43. Japan's commitment to the advancement of women and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective had been reiterated in a number of policy statements and decisions. The Prime Minister of Japan had unequivocally stated in the Diet that the proportion of women in leadership positions was expected to increase to 30 per cent, with a view to achieving equal representation between women and men. Her Government would endeavour to advance the status of women by improving women's representation in all spheres of society. In that connection, her delegation wished to encourage the United Nations system to increase the number of qualified female staff and the appointment of qualified female candidates at high levels, in conformity with the principle of equitable geographical distribution, with a view to promoting gender equality and achieving gender balance in the United Nations system; in addition, her delegation also wished to encourage the United Nations system to recruit more men and women from unrepresented or under-represented countries, including Japan. Moreover, in August 2003 Japan's revised Official Development Assistance Charter, which laid out five basic policies on Japanese assistance, had been approved. In connection with one of those pillars, "Assurance of fairness", the revised Charter stated that the perspective of gender equality was particularly important in the formulation and implementation of assistance policies and should always be taken into consideration. Her Government accordingly reaffirmed its determination to make further efforts to improve the status of women, giving special consideration to women's active participation in development, making sure that women reaped benefits from development.

44. Japan had submitted its fourth and fifth reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which had considered them on 8 July. In its concluding comments on the reports, that Committee had congratulated Japan on its important achievements in promoting a gender-equal society, and in particular a series of legal initiatives and reforms, the allocation of approximately 10 per cent of official developed assistance to gender-related projects in developing countries and the establishment of partnership with women's non-governmental organizations in the preparation of the reports. Japan would carefully consider the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and take any necessary measures.

45. After congratulating the new Special Rapporteur on violence against women upon her appointment, she said that Japan recognized trafficking in women and girls as a serious problem which constituted a grave violation of human rights. Japan had made great efforts to address that problem, cooperating with law-enforcement and immigration authorities in the countries of origin and transit in the Asian and Pacific region to investigate cases of trafficking and prevent new crimes. Her Government would continue to do its utmost to combat that form of violence against women and girls and to support the victims.

46. Her delegation was profoundly pleased that the Government of the Sudan had convened at Khartoum in August 2003 the Regional Symposium on the

Abolition of Female Genital Mutilation to Ensure Safe Motherhood, sponsored by UNICEF and Japan. It was of great importance to recognize that the problem of female genital mutilation was related to four of the eight Millennium Development Goals: empowerment of women and girls and promotion of gender equality; reduction of child mortality; improving maternal health; and combating HIV/AIDS. Japan strongly hoped that the harmful consequences of female genital mutilation would be more effectively addressed and that that practice would be eliminated anywhere in the world where it was found at present.

47. Japan believed that the tenth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, to be observed in 2005, provided an important opportunity for emphasizing the continuing relevance of the gender issue to the world. However, it did not necessarily believe it would be productive to organize a large-scale conference such as Beijing+5 and negotiate another outcome document. It would be more effective to address the importance of the issue, for example, by holding a high-level meeting on the gender issue, which would make it possible to mark the year commemoratively and to great effect.

48. **Ms. Tan** (Singapore) said that, as could be seedn from the 2002 World Report on Violence and Health prepared by the World Health Organization and from a UNIFEM-commissioned report, violence against women continued to be a serious problem despite the existence of declarations and international agreements on the subject. It was urgent that a larger number of countries should adopt legislation for the adequate protection of the victims of domestic violence and that such legislation should be effectively implemented. Singapore, which continued to be a conservative country in many respects, was implementing legal and educational strategies and a multidisciplinary and inter-agency approach with a view to preserving traditional values while changing those standards which did not respect women's rights and were not consistent with women's social and economic importance in society.

49. In the legal sphere, Singapore had recently strengthened provisions relating to domestic violence in its Women's Charter, so that it included in the definition of domestic violence not only physical violence but also intimidation, harassment and restraint. The Family Court issued orders of protection for victims of domestic violence, granted the protected person the exclusive right to occupy the shared residence and severely punished those who violated orders of protection. Moreover, through its Family Transformation and Protection Unit, it was carrying out prevention and rehabilitation programmes to prevent violent behaviour in the future. That infrastructure had been established after a process of consultation with non-governmental organizations which provided female victims of violence with services such as shelters, telephone hotlines, free legal assistance and medical examinations.

50. Education was a crucial instrument for helping to eliminate social attitudes and practices that gave rise to violence against women. Both men and women must know the law in order to be able to take decisions in full knowledge of the facts. In Singapore educational efforts were aimed at all sectors of society. For example, an interministerial Women and Family Violence Committee trained police officers in the handling of domestic violence, coordinated the activities of service providers and reinforced support services. Domestic violence could not be tolerated or justified. At the national level, a multidisciplinary policy which included the activities of courts, the police, hospitals and social agencies, and appropriate rehabilitation and counselling programmes formed the most effective method for eradicating such violence. At the international level, the exchange of experience and suitable practices in the governmental and non-governmental sectors would also facilitate progress. Domestic violence was a scourge to every society that considered itself civilized, and the only ethical response was to do everything possible to eradicate it.

51. **Ms. Pulido** (Venezuela) said that her delegation associated itself with the statements made by the representatives of Morocco and Peru on behalf of the States members of the Group of 77 and China and those of the Rio Group, respectively, and that in Venezuela attacks on the integrity and health of women and girls constituted violations of their human rights. Her Government had adopted an Act on Violence against Women and the Family and had submitted new draft legislation, for example in the health sphere, to strengthen the existing legal provisions on the subject. The National Plan for Prevention of and Attention to Violence for 2000-2005 provided a telephone hotline and shelters for the victims of domestic violence.

52. The Venezuelan Constitution guaranteed housewives and older women the right to social security. In the context of Citizen Power, the National

Office for the Defence of Human Rights was the existing mechanism for incorporating a gender perspective into the reform of national legislative power, specifically through the drafting of a bill on responsible fatherhood, working documents on the right of housewives to social security and the act on stable cohabitation and de-facto unions.

53. Her delegation wished to reaffirm the importance of carrying out the commitments made at the Fourth World Conference on Women and following up the Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. Her Government had focused on the objective of reducing poverty in the short and medium term through social and economic strategies aimed at meeting basic needs in the spheres of health, nutrition, education, work, defence of human rights and equitable distribution of wealth. It should be noted that Venezuela had been suffering from an economic, political and social crisis since the early 1980s, and that that crisis had particularly impacted the development opportunities and quality of life of rural and indigenous women.

54. With regard to the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), she said that the efforts of the Working Group established under General Assembly resolution 57/125 to collaborate with the Secretary-General in formulating recommendations on the future functioning of INSTRAW had run into many difficulties in the course of the year, including a lack of clear and precise information, which had caused loss of time and financial resources and had given rise to lack of confidence in the Secretariat's unit responsible for gender matters. She hoped that a director of INSTRAW would be appointed in the near future in order to make it a viable institution.

55. **Ms. Kapalata** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that her delegation associated itself with the statements made by the representative of Malawi on behalf of the Southern African Development Community and by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. It was necessary to collaborate more closely in order to attain the objective of equality between men and women. With regard to the Secretary-General's report on improvement of the status of women in the United Nations system (A/58/374), she welcomed the fact that the objective of ensuring equality of representation between men and women on the Organization's staff continued to be an important priority, and she hoped that the upcoming study on the causes of the slow pace of the advancement of women in the United Nations system would serve as a basis for drawing up new strategies not only for gender balance but also for geographical balance.

56. With regard to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, her Government was continuing to make progress in some spheres. For example, the Constitution guaranteed women 20 per cent of parliamentary seats and 33 per cent representation in local governments, and her Government was confident that it would be able to reach and even surpass the objective specified by the Southern African Development Community, namely, that at least 30 per cent of decision-making positions would be held by women before 2005, the year for which the country's next elections were scheduled. In addition, her country had made definite progress in the area of education. Measures were being taken to achieve equal registration of boys and girls in primary schools and prevent girls from dropping out of school. A number of measures for supporting girls in schools had been adopted, all-girl schools had been re-established and free registration in primary schools had been instituted.

57. Her Government was a firm believer in women's human rights, and for that reason it had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and was working assiduously to be able to ratify the Convention's Optional Protocol. She thanked the United Nations for organizing through the Division for the Advancement of Women a judicial colloquium and a training workshop for governmental staff on reporting under the Convention. Thise initiatives had greatly enhanced capacities for understanding the Convention and the preparation of reports on its implementation.

58. With regard to rural women, she said that in her country women made up a majority of the rural population and accounted for 80 per cent of food production, so that they were the key stakeholders in sustainable rural development. Her Government agreed with the recommendation contained in the Secretary-General's report (A/58/167) on the need to promote participation by rural women in the formulation of all policies and programmes that affected them directly. The mobilization and organizing of rural women was fundamental, in view of the important role they played

in the economic development of much of Africa. For that reason, high-level consultations should be held, including the exchange of good practices and the establishment of an international framework of collaboration in that sphere. Multilateralism was indispensable in the current age of globalization.

59. **Ms. Al-Shamsi** (United Arab Emirates) commended the efforts of the United Nations to improve the status of women throughout the world and expressed confidence that the international community would be able to improve on a global and permanent basis the conditions in which millions of women suffering from poverty, contagious diseases, sexual and physical abuse, trafficking in persons, armed conflicts and foreign occupation still lived.

60. Her Government considered women to be partners in the development process and had adopted a number of legislative provisions to ensure women's full participation in society, providing them with equality of opportunity in work, education, social justice and property ownership. Maternity leave had been extended from 45 days to six months, and laws for protecting national and immigrant women against discrimination and violence had been adopted. Her Government was examining the possibility of taking action on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Thanks to the directives of her country's President and his wife, who was head of the General Women's Union, women in the United Arab Emirates had made notable advances in education and employment. The rate of illiteracy had been reduced to less than 10 per cent; women constituted 57 per cent of university students and 59 per cent of the country's workforce and held 30 per cent of senior decision-making positions. Since its establishment in 1975, the General Women's Union had been one of the most effective national agencies for the advancement of women. In December 2002 the President of the Union had launched the New National Strategy for the Development of Women, implementing the draft recommendations of the Beijing Summit. Moreover, in 2003 the President had decreed the establishment of the Supreme Council of Maternity and Childhood, which had the mission of formulating policies for the welfare of mothers and children and coordinating their implementation by the country's competent authorities. The General Women's Union had sponsored and actively participated in a number of regional and international conferences on women and the family, the most recent of which had been the Arab Women and Media Forum held in 2002, which had focused on strengthening the role of women in information media. Her Government recognized that women's participation in information media was one of the fundamental requirements for their advancement and empowerment , and it had demonstrated that recognition by appointing a woman to head one of the country's powerful communication centres, the Dubai Press Club. Her country would host the Third Arab Women's Summit, to be held in November 2004.

61. In recent years the women of the United Arab Emirates had successfully participated in the process of decision-making, which constituted an important step towards their participation in politics at the highest levels in the near future. Lastly, it must not be forgotten that women in Palestine, Afghanistan and Iraq were the ones suffering the most from the effects of violence and humiliation on a daily basis, and concerted efforts must be made to alleviate their suffering.

62. **Mr. Nikiforov** (Russian Federation) said that women's rights were an integral and inseparable part of universal human rights and that processes currently going on, inter alia the globalization of the economy, the widening of the gap between poverty and wealth, the deterioration of the environment, had a negative impact on the status of women. Russia shared the focus of the United Nations on gender equality, since that was absolutely necessary for achieving sustainable social development and creating the conditions for the realization of human potential. Consequently attention must be focused on spheres in which flagrant discrimination against women still existed, for example in the political and economic sector, and special measures, including legislative measures, must be taken to achieve equality of opportunity for men and women and to improve women's social status.

63. The Commission on the Legal and Social Status of Women coordinated the activities of the United Nations for the implementation of the documents adopted at the Beijing and Beijing+5 Conferences. It was crucial that the Commission should produce concrete and practical results, since a great deal stili remained to be done. The Commission had, for the first time, been unable to adopt agreed conclusions even on such a basic subject as violence against women. Russia, as a member of the Commission, would endeavour to give new impetus to the Commission and

its work and facilitate the establishment of a nonconfrontational dialogue. It firmly supported the provisions of such a fundamental document as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, by formulating strategies for socio-economic development, bearing in mind the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Preparations were being made to ratify the Convention's Optional Protocol, which Russia had signed in May 2001.

64. His Government had prepared a fundamentally new programme document: a gender strategy that would define a system of requirements and criteria for the socially fair distribution of men's and women's functions in society, in public and political life, among other spheres. A national plan of action for improving the status of women and strengthening their role in society for the period 2001-2005 had been prepared. A law on State guarantees for the equality of rights, freedoms and opportunities of men and women had been approved at first reading; efforts were being made to increase women's participation in the structures of power and ensuring that women were better represented in decision-making posts.

65. With regard to trafficking in persons, his Government would in the future ratify the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Sanction Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, which had been signed by his Government in December 2000. Draft legislation to combat trafficking in persons had been prepared, and in its drafting attention had been given to the provisions of that Protocol, other international legislative documents, recommendations of international organizations and the legislative experience of a number of countries. The Penal Code had been improved so as to include norms classifying as crimes any trafficking in children, the smuggling of women to other countries and forced participation in prostitution. A law for the protection of witnesses was being prepared, and the work of Russian non-governmental organizations had been intensified, since without them it would be impossible in the present circumstances to work effectively against trafficking in persons and to provide assistance to its victims. The Russian Federation welcomed the cooperation of the international community in that sphere and was prepared to undertake dialogue with any interested parties.

66. **Mr. Gallegos** (Ecuador) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Peru on behalf of the Rio Group. Although the fundamental right to equality had been reaffirmed in conferences, treaties, declarations and other public forums in which Governments participated, discrimination against women still existed in many countries of the world. Even so, as a result of the commitments made by the international community, there had undeniably been many unprecedented changes making possible the advancement of women.

67. Ecuador was a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and had ratified its Optional Protocol. Implementing the provisions of that instrument and demonstrating the support it gave to the Convention, his Government had in July 2003 submitted to the Committee on the Elimination Discrimination against Women its combined fourth and fifth reports, which reflected the advances made by his country in that sphere. Ecuador, in conformity with international commitments, had achieved important advances in connection with the rights of Ecuadorean women and the institutionalization of policies that benefited women and were designed to achieve gender equality. In the legislative sphere reforms of the Civil Code and other legislation aimed at defending women's rights had been adopted, with a view to eliminating discrimination against women and promoting their advancement. Information campaigns to prevent acts of violence had also been developed.

68. Nevertheless, poverty continued to be one of the greatest problems directly affecting women. In recent years the phenomenon of migration had become acute; observers had helplessly watched women forced to abandon their children in order to provide better economic conditions for them and women who had to deal alone with the upbringing of their children because their husbands were leaving their homes in search of better incomes. Migrant women, indigenous women and older women deserved special attention because they were suffering abuse and violation of their rights. His Government was firmly convinced of the need to strengthen the role of women because they were essential in attaining the country's goals for social and economic development, and to that end, it

was seeking the formulation and implementation of policies, programmes and projects on the subjects of violence, health, education, work and access to resources. He reaffirmed his Government's commitment to the protection of women, girls and female adolescents and to the objective of achieving equality for them.

69. **Ms. Al-Malki** (Qatar) said that her country was committed to strengthening human rights and the position of the individual in society, which would benefit the advancement and empowerment of women. The Constitution adopted in April 2003 provided that all citizens had the same rights and obligations and were equal before the law, declared torture to be a crime and recognized the rights of association and freedom of opinion, the press, education and religion. It also prohibited discrimination between men and women in elections or candidatures to the Advisory Council.

70. The National Committee on Human Rights, established in 2002 and consisting of members of the Government and civil society, including three women, had as its purpose planning for the realization of the goals of those treaties and international conventions on human rights to which Qatar had become a party, advising State institutions on human rights and freedoms, suggest ways to correct abuses, cooperate with international and regional institutions on human rights and promoting the culture of human rights in the country.

71. The women of Qatar had made considerable progress thanks to the Government's political will and its programmes placing women in decision-making posts, such as the appointment of a woman with ministerial rank to the post of Deputy Chairperson of the Higher Council on Family Matters, the appointment of a woman to be Minister of Education, the appointment of a female Rector of the University of Qatar and the election, for the first time, of a woman to be a member of the Council of Municipalities. The Higher Council on Family Matters, which was the institution representing women in Qatar, had prepared a national strategy for the advancement of women in cooperation with UNIFEM in order to ensure their greater participation in leadership and decision-making posts, change the social values that made their participation and development difficult and promote the Arab and Islamic principles relating to the complementarity of the roles of men and women in society.

72. Qatar was aware of the relationship between education and development and attached special importance to the improvement and reform of education. The Higher Council on Education had been established in 2002 in order to improve education in the country, and the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Social Development, a non-profit organization, was offering educational and professional opportunities for citizens of the country and of neighbouring States. An indication of the importance of women in Qatar society was the selection of Her Highness Muza bint Nasir Al-Musannad as special envoy to UNESCO in the sphere of basic and higher education and the creation, at her initiative, of an international fund to support education in Iraq, to which Qatar had been the first country to contribute.

73. It was essential to facilitate an environment of peace, security and respect for human rights in order to ensure that both men and women would be able to enjoy their rights and contribute to development. The Middle East region was suffering the scourge of wars and conflicts as a result of foreign occupation, a fact which impacted the status of Arab men and especially that of Arab women. The international community should devote more attention to the status of women in situations of conflict and occupation, in order that the deliberations on their condition might be something more than a mere theoretical exercise.

74. **Ms. Šimonović** (Croatia) said that her country gave high priority to the question of women's equality, a fact reflected in the adoption of two new laws on gender equality and on protection against domestic violence. The problem of domestic violence had become more visible in recent years, owing to the greater number of complaints against such acts, and required a vigorous response by the State. In that connection, the Criminal Code and the Family Act had been reformed, and the new law on protection against domestic violence introduced a series of precautionary measures, including restraining orders. That law also addressed the problem of unreported cases by requiring health and social-security staff and psychologists, social workers and educators to report such cases to the competent authorities.

75. The new law on gender equality had strengthened the institutional mechanisms for promoting women's

equality and combating discrimination against women. There was, for the first time, a law dealing with the subject of gender equality in a systematic manner, using as its basis the definition of discrimination that appeared in the Convention. Its greatest achievements were the introduction of temporary special measures to promote equal participation of men and women in the organs of legislative, executive and judicial power and the establishment of the Office of Gender Equality and the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality to facilitate its implementation and monitoring,. Croatia was making progress in reporting to the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. His Government had prepared and approved a combined second and third report, and for the first time it had invited non-governmental organizations to contribute their comments and remarks and to examine the final version before its submission to that Committee. In that connection, he mentioned that his Government had also approved and accepted the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention.

76. Croatia had collaborated with UNIFEM in a joint initiative to improve the mechanisms for submitting reports and monitoring the implementation of the Convention in six Central and Eastern European countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Croatia). On 25 and 26 October 2003 a conference would be held at Dubrovnik, Croatia, with the main objective of facilitating a forum for exchanging best practices and the experience acquired, analysing the achievements reached and identifying common trends and the challenges that still remained to be met in the participating countries and the observer countries of the region.

77. **Ms. von Lilien-Waldau** (International Fund for Agricultural Development) recalled that with the adoption of the Millennium Declaration in 2000, world leaders had reached agreement on a set of interlinked and mutually reinforcing goals to achieve the fundamental development objectives of the international community. The fight against extreme poverty was the first of several goals geared towards freeing humanity from want. Gender equality and the elimination of gender-based discrimination were development objectives in themselves, as well as necessary means for reaching the goal of reducing hunger and poverty by half by the year 2015. The majority of people who suffered from hunger and tried to survive on a dollar a day lived and worked in rural areas. It was widely recognized that achieving the goal of reducing extreme poverty required women's access to and control over productive assets, particularly benefits from natural resources, as well as access to financial services, markets and technology. It had been likewise accepted that poverty reduction called for women's empowerment and their participation in and benefiting from rural development initiatives. Rural women did most of the work in small-scale and labour-intensive agriculture. In some developing countries the proportion of woman-headed households reached almost one third. In Africa 70 per cent of women worked in agriculture. However, women received only 5 per cent of extension services worldwide, and African women had access to only 1 per cent of the official credit available in the agricultural sector. The dramatic imbalance between what rural women did and what they had was a root cause of poverty and made women particularly vulnerable to it.

78. The policies and programmes of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) fully mainstreamed rural women not only as the basic beneficiaries but also as active agents of change. Facilitating access to productive assets, an important means for women's economic empowerment, had long been IFAD's main entry point to improve the overall status of women. Through its operations, IFAD aimed to expand women's access to and control over fundamental assets; to increase women's role in decision-making, both public and private; and to improve women's standard of living and livelihood options. In practice, that included increasing women's access to and control over income and access to land, providing credit and savings facilities, investing in basic rural services, improving market linkages and infrastructure, building women's knowledge and skills and strengthening women's organizations and their representation in political bodies.

79. The important role of rural women at the policy and decision-making levels had also been recognized in the Ministerial Declaration adopted by the Economic and Social Council during its high-level segment in mid-2003. IFAD would continue to contribute to expanding rural women's role in policy-making by supporting grass-roots organizations and helping to transform them into sustainable local institutions representing the interests of rural women. Likewise, IFAD would continue its advocacy for decentralization of governmental institutions in order to increase

opportunities for women to contribute to the political process through political representation.

80. IFAD's experience showed that projects were most successful when activities aimed at improving women's economic status and their organizational and decision-making capacities were complemented by investments in such spheres as water supply, health and functional literacy. Such investments gave women the needed time, energy and know-how to become actively involved in economic, social and political arenas. When women's rights to land and common property resources had been secured, achievements became more sustainable. When poor women were asked what they wanted for themselves, they spoke of economic independence, access to property, knowledge, respect and a voice in household and community matters and political decision-making. It was important that the development community should seek to focus on the aspirations of rural women themselves in order to make the Millennium Development Goals not a faraway dream but a real-life opportunity to reduce poverty.

81. **Ms. Valdivieso** (World Bank) said that in carrying out its development plans, the World Bank recognized the need for a strategic focus on the links between the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals. The World Bank strongly supported the Beijing Platform for Action and believed that the commitments contained in the Millennium Declaration represented a paradigm shift for development that required the adoption of an expanded vision of development, in which human development was vigorously promoted as the key to achieving sustainable social and economic progress in all countries. That vision could become a reality only if there was a basic recognition of the importance of gender equality and the empowerment of women, without which none of the Millennium Development Goals could truly be achieved. For example, total agricultural output in sub-Saharan Africa could increase by up to 20 per cent if women's access to agricultural inputs were on a par with that of men.

82. Millennium Development Goal 3 addressed gender equality specifically. Although the purpose of that goal was defined as eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education, it must not be forgotten that the goal aimed to capture the richness of the entire Beijing Platform for Action and to address progress on all the 12 critical areas identified at Beijing. Even if inequalities in education were reduced, other gender differences in labour- market opportunities, legal rights and the ability to participate in public life and decision-making tended to continue. Likewise it should not be forgotten that the achievement of gender equality was not only an important objective in itself but also a means for gaining other advances. Disregard of gender inequalities came at great cost to people's well-being and to countries' ability to grow sustainably, to govern effectively and thus to reduce poverty. Gender inequalities also contributed to the non-monetary aspects of poverty, such as the lack of opportunity, empowerment and security, and thereby lowered the quality of life for women, men and children. While women and girls bore the largest and most direct costs of gender inequalities and gender-based violence, those costs cut broadly across society, ultimately hindering development and harming everyone. The ambitious agenda set out in the Millennium Declaration could be met only by ensuring that women and men had equal capacities, opportunities and voice, as the Members of the United Nations had agreed to ensure when they had adopted the Beijing Platform for Action.

83. The World Bank had made gender equality a central element of its struggle against poverty in order to attain the Millennium Development Goals. Two years earlier it had adopted a new strategy of gender mainstreaming based on a country-led and country-specific approach, starting with the identification of critical gender issues and working with member countries in the design and implementation of adequate programmes to address them. The Bank participated in the Education for All partnership, which was committed to ensuring by 2015 all children, especially girls, would have access to and would complete free and compulsory education of good quality, and the Bank was also an active partner of the Education for All Fast Track Initiative. Since the Beijing Conference, the Bank had loaned some approximately $US6.5 billion for girls' education. The Bank, which was the largest single external funder of health programmes, committed an average of $US1.3 billion each year in new lending for health projects in the developing world. Since the Beijing Conference over two thirds of those projects had included gender-related goals.

84. Apart from health and education, gender equality was also considered fundamental in policy formulation, research and lending in other sectors. It was enhancing its efforts to assist countries in integrating a gender

perspective into the Poverty Reduction Strategy process. During the past year, for example, it had provided resources to increase the level of gender awareness of provincial officials responsible for implementing Viet Nam's comprehensive poverty-reduction strategy.

85. Although the situation of women and girls had improved in many respects, much remained to be done. In no region of the world were women and men equal in legal, social and economic rights. In South Asia women had only half as many years of schooling as men. Worldwide, women held only 10 per cent of the seats in national parliaments. New challenges were also emerging: in young females aged 15 to 24 the rates of HIV/AIDS prevalence were six times higher than in males, and in sub-Saharan Africa 55 per cent of those infected were women. A world of six billion people in which one billion owned 80 per cent of global gross domestic product while another billion survived on less than a dollar a day was a world out of balance. With only 12 short years left to reach the Millennium Development Goals, everyone must act together immediately to rebalance the world and give all of its inhabitants, both women and men, the right to build lives of dignity, free from want.

86. **Ms. Bayarmaa** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that despite the many declarations made during the past 30 years, the status of women had not improved much and there was an urgent need to find new ways of addressing the issue.

87. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) welcomed the fact that the Millennium Development Goals included as a priority subject the elimination of inequality between men and women, and it called upon Governments and other interested entities to make a firm and clear commitment to ensuring equal opportunity to men and women who participated in the preparation and delivery of services, something it considered essential both for the implementation of specific programmes and for overall national development. IFRC attached great importance to equality of opportunity for its own staff and volunteers, so as to provide quality services. It encouraged its staff and volunteers not to base their work on the assumption that women were most vulnerable but to assess needs and capacities from both women's and men's perspective. That required consistent efforts to raise awareness, change attitudes, and develop tools, skills and competences.

88. IFRC's local presence gave it a unique opportunity to put suffering women in touch with people who tried to help them improve their condition and that of their community. Many national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies were operating special projects for women. A recent example was the organizing of social-rehabilitation centres for vulnerable women, established by the Kyrgyzstan Red Crescent Society in cooperation with the Netherlands Red Cross; there were also various small projects involving collaboration with remote mountain communities carried out by the Kyrgyzstan Red Crescent Society with the support of the Netherlands Government.

89. National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies organized themselves to network and to learn from each other. For example, as a direct follow-up to the Tehran Declaration, approved by the Middle Eastern and North African Societies in 2001, there had been created a network of coordination centres on gender issues whose objective was to promote a gender perspective in all the activities and programmes of IFRC member societies in the region. Another example of gender mainstreaming could be seen in the annual fellowships offered by IFRC to its staff to attend training courses on gender subjects in various countries. IFRC had published a gender training manual for its members, which was designed to complement the work of IFRC and serve as a tool for adapting overall policies to specific circumstances. She thanked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland for its help in the preparation of the manual.

90. IFRC still had not reached its target for diversity and gender balance in its Geneva secretariat and field delegations. It believed that hiring women was not only desirable but also necessary for better communication with the women it endeavoured to aid. For that reason, at its twenty-eighth Conference, which would be held in December 2003 at Geneva, it would reaffirm the promise it had made its twenty-seventh Conference. In that context, IFRC believed that there must be a commitment to establish a new system for assessing actions and their impact, which meant a new criterion of responsibility applicable to all programmes, one that took account of the work of supervision and evaluation. If new criteria were not adopted, the objective of truly integrating gender perspective into

policies and programmes would remain a dream. The attainment of the Millennium Development Goals depended on full recognition of the importance of gender equality for society.

91. **Mr. Helle** (International Committee of the Red Cross) said that the difficult situation of women during armed conflicts continued to cause concern to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which during the past four years had put into practice the commitment made in 1999, at the twenty-seventh International Conference of the Federation of International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, with regard to the status of women in situations of armed conflict. ICRC would submit its report on the progress made at the twenty-eighth International Conference and would continue to implement the many recommendations for protecting and assisting women which were contained in its analysis on women in war situations, published in English in 2001. At present it was preparing a guidance document that would be published in early 2004 and would have the objective of serving as a tool for ensuring that humanitarian services and programmes would adequately address the needs of women. The document would be organized according to subject, taking account of the fact that women's experience in armed conflicts was highly varied and that women did not inevitably have to be victims, that instead, throughout the world, women's experience in armed conflicts included social, public and political activities, as well as service in the armed forces.

92. He reaffirmed that sexual violence was unacceptable and was prohibited by international humanitarian law, whether as a method of warfare, torture or ethnic cleansing. Sexual violence could be prevented, and the methods for its prevention and for helping its victims must be improved. Furthermore, ICRC was determined to improve its assessment of the impact of armed conflicts on the persons it was trying to protect and to improve its care for the women affected by armed conflicts. All competent agents would have to make a greater effort to improve the situation. To that end, it was essential to promote awareness and implementation of international law. Improvement of the status of women in armed conflicts could and must be achieved.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.